



New Programme Validation Report

Report of the External Review Panel

Programme Reference Number:	52
Faculty/School(s):	School of Science, Sligo
Department(s):	Pharmacy
Type of Review:	External Panel

Details of Programme(s) Reviewed:

Title:	Award Type:	NFQ Level:	ECTS:	Duration:	Delivery Mode:	Proposed Student Intake:	Proposed Start Date:
Master of Pharmacy	Major	9	330	5 Years	Fulltime onsite	36	Sept 2025
BSc in Pharmacy	Major	8	240	4 Years	Fulltime onsite	n/a exit	n/a exit

Date of Review:	7 th Nov. 2024
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Review Panel

Panellist Role	Title	Name	Organisation	Job Title
Chair	Ms	Aileen Kennedy	MTU Munster Technological University Tralee, Co. Kerry.	Assistant Registrar and Head of Student Engagement (and Teaching and Learning)
External Academic Discipline Expert	Dr	JJ Keating	School of Pharmacy, University College Cork	Lecturer of Organic and Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Pharmacist
External Academic Discipline Expert	Dr	John Fletcher	School of Life Sciences, Pharmacy and Chemistry, Kingston University, UK	Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutics

Industry/ Community Representative	Ms	Sinead McCool	Irish Pharmacy Union, Butterfield House, Rathfarnham, Dublin	Head of Professional Services, Irish Pharmacy Union.
Student Representative	Mr	Agni Paul	Department of Computing, ATU.	PhD Researcher
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar (VPAAR) Nominee (Academic Secretary)	Dr	Aodhmar Cadogan	ATU.	Assistant Registrar.
Recording Secretary	Ms	Gemma Lyons	ATU.	QA Compliance.

All external members of the panel have declared that they are independent of ATU (Atlantic Technological University), and all have declared that they have no conflict of interest.

Programme Design Team

The panel met the staff listed below during the review process.

Dr Thomas Smyth	Head of Faculty of Science, ATU Sligo.
Dr Marita Kinsella	Head of Department and programme Lead, ATU Sligo.
Dr Mairead Casserly	Programme Development Team, Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacy & Pharmacy Practice ATU.
Dr Rosemary Smyth	Associate Visiting Lecturer and advisor to the Programme Development Team, Consultant and Part time Lecturer ATU.
Dr Patricia Ging	Programme Development Team, Lecturer in Pharmacology & Pharmacy, Department of Pharmacy, ATU Sligo

Introduction

The development of a five year Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) award programme by ATU is a strategic priority nationally and for the Northwest-BMW region and importantly is core to ATU's vision in its new Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028: Open Minds, Bright Futures[1] of becoming a university that “enhances the quality of life in our region”.

In line with Theme 1 of its Strategic Plan: Enabling Education for Student Success, ATU is strategically ambitious to build range and depth in its education and research offerings across clinical healthcare disciplines, thereby working to serve the health needs and improve the quality of life of the population across the North-West-BMW region. Furthermore, Life Sciences, Medtech, Medical Devices and Health are identified as research priority areas for ATU under Theme 2: Engaged Research in the University's Strategic Plan.

Development of ATU's MPharm programme also align with strategic priorities nationally. During 2022/2023 the Higher Education Authority undertook a process in relation to the provision of additional educational capacity in pharmacy and the other healthcare professions. ATU made a

proposal regarding an MPharm programme to HEA. In June 2023, the Government announced plans to expand third level places for pharmacy and other healthcare. In October 2024, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science, announced the allocation of €130M in funding from the National Training Fund to enable the creation of six new healthcare programmes, including the MPharm Programme at ATU Sligo.

There is a widely-documented shortage of pharmacists nationally and regionally, affecting all sectors of pharmacy including community, hospital, and pharmacist industrial roles in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical devices sectors.

From a regulatory perspective, the PSI also strongly welcomed Government's announcement on options to expand pharmacy. The opportunity to increase the number of pharmacy graduates in Ireland aligns with the PSI work to address pharmacy workforce issues and develop a framework to respond to future pharmacy workforce needs. In September 2023, the PSI published its first Workforce Intelligence Report (2023) and found that there are risks to the continued availability of pharmacists in patient-facing roles (i.e. community and hospital pharmacy)[2].

For ATU, the establishment of an MPharm programme at the Sligo Campus is a natural progression for the Faculty of Science, building on ATU's strong track-record in the delivery of pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical sciences programmes, in addition to an established portfolio of health and clinical sciences programmes, including in a number of health and social care regulated professions. It will also align with ATU's existing professional and academic programme partnerships including NIBRT, IMDA, IBMS, IBEC, University of Galway and Ulster University.

Rationale for Programme(s)

ATU's delivery of an MPharm programme supports a range of strategic national and regional policy priorities, as well as contributing to ATU's achievement of its new Strategic Plan.

Other justifications for the MPharm programme include:

- a) Designation of ATU as a technological university cleared the way for MPharm programme, as required by European legislation.
- b) ATU's strategic vision to enhance its education and research offerings in pharmaceutical sciences & clinical healthcare disciplines, in serving the Northwest-BMW region
- c) Critical regional and national shortage of pharmacists

There is a widely-documented shortage of pharmacists nationally and regionally, affecting all sectors of pharmacy including community, hospital, and pharmacist industrial roles in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical devices sectors.

- d) Undersupply of pharmacist graduates by the Irish higher education sector

A significant contributing factor to the chronic pharmacist shortage, both nationally and within the NW-BMW region, is the undersupply of pharmacist graduates by the Irish higher education sector. Pharmacist registration data from the PSI 2023 Annual Report[3] shows a total of 524 new pharmacist registrations in 2023. Of those, only ca. 35% (n=184) were trained in Ireland, while the remaining ca. 65% (n=340) were trained outside of Ireland. There are currently only three Schools of Pharmacy in Ireland, with the most recent School opening over 20 years ago.

e) Lack of regional opportunities for Irish students to undertake a pharmacy programme

The three current Schools of Pharmacy in Ireland are located in the major urban centres of Dublin (Trinity College, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland) and Cork (University College Cork). This lack of regional opportunities to undertake an MPharm programme has meant that students from the North-West-BMW region must travel to Dublin, Cork, Northern Ireland or the UK, depleting this region of pharmacists, especially the newly qualified, as well as pharmacy internship students. An MPharm at ATU would provide critically-needed pharmacy graduates for the national pool and would address geographic dispersal of graduates in Ireland.

[1] Art 44.1, EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC) Directive 2005/36/EC on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (consolidated)

[2] Irish Pharmacy Union Workforce Analysis Report (2022), <https://ipu.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ba-survey.pdf>.

[3] PSI Annual Report (2023) Annual Report_2023.pdf (thepsi.ie)

Validation Criteria

ATU's Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy specifies that new programmes must comply with the following criteria for validation:

1. The programme aims and learning outcomes are clear and aligned with the proposed award title.
2. The rationale for the programme is well informed and justified.
3. The design of the programme is suitably structured and fit for purpose.
4. The design of the programme ensures that students can successfully achieve the Programme Learning Outcomes.
5. The teaching, learning and assessment strategy is well planned and appropriate for the discipline area and type of award.
6. Assessment techniques are fair, valid, reliable, consistent and a credible measure of the academic standard attained by students.
7. The planned resources, including staff, physical, online, library and student supports, sufficiently support the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the programme.
8. The programme facilitates lifelong learning for a diverse student population by setting out appropriate entry requirements and opportunities for access, transfer, and progression.
9. There is demand for potential graduates from the programme.
10. The learning environment and mode of delivery are consistent with the needs of the intended students of the programme and accessible and appropriate support services for students have been provided for.
11. Students will be well informed on the requirements of the programme, guided to relevant resources and supported in their studies in a caring environment.

The Panel reviewed the programme and the embedded exit award and are satisfied that the proposed programme(s) meet ATU's validation criteria above without any further conditions. There are a number of recommendations that the panel have made which will enhance and strengthen the programme.

Findings

Overall Finding

Validated without changes	
Validated subject to condition(s) and/or recommendation(s)	X
Rejected	

Reason for Overall Finding

The panel are satisfied that there is a strong programme proposal, is a robust rationale for the programme need and a clear demand for the programme. The delivery of the programme and the planned supports for students have been considered and planned for.

The panel was cognisant that the mandatory components of the PSI core Competency Framework, EU regulations and the QP requirements of the HPRA, are very prescribed and were clearly aligned. There is limited scope in term of changing the content and syllabi of the modules. Consequently, the panel input and discussion focussed on the teaching and learning, assessment, delivery, and the organisational and management arrangements for the programme. Extensive laboratory, teaching and physical resources are already available in the school of Science to support the programme.

Commendations

The Validation Panel advises Academic Council of the following commendations.

1. Successful proposal in response to the call from government to the provision of additional educational capacity in pharmacy.
2. The depth and breadth of professional and discipline specific expertise of the existing staff within the established Department of Pharmacy and of the wider staff teams across the expansive range of programmes being delivered across the Faculty of Science.
3. The high standard and comprehensive nature of the programme documentation provided, the presentation provided by the programme development team (PDT) at the panel meeting and the additional information (photographs and videos) evidencing the physical resources and facilities to support the delivery of the programme.
4. The positive and open engagement by the PDT with the panel during the panel discussion.

Conditions

The Validation Panel advises Academic Council that subject to meeting any condition(s) detailed below, the panel is satisfied that the proposed programme(s) meets the validation criteria as set out in Atlantic Technological University's Developing and Validating New Programmes Policy.

There are no conditions.

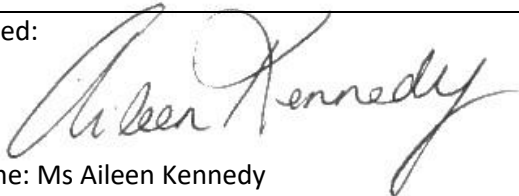
Recommendations

The panel advises Academic Council that the Programme Development Team and/or the Department should take cognisance of any recommendations outlined below.

1. By the end of the full roll-out of the MPharm programme, the Departments full complement of staff is outlined as follows: one Head of Department, eight lecturers, one technician and one administrator. Outside of these department specific staff to be recruited, detail the full complement of staff including from across the Faculty of Science and their relevant required expertise to support the delivery of the full suite of modules, including work placement.
2. Recruit the practice educator earlier than in year 3 as currently planned to establish the working relationship required with the affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APEL).
3. The commitment to inter-professional learning (IPL) is evident from the presentation and discussions with the PDT. To evidence of this required commitment IPL needs to be made explicit and detailed in the programme documentation, with a detailed implementation plan for IPL throughout the programme, including timetabling of same from programme planning stage onwards.
4. The commitment to a teaching and learning strategy of integration both horizontally and vertically across modules 'in year' and between years and incorporating learning from practical training placements is referenced in the programme documentation. Provide examples of how this level of integration is being implemented across the programme e.g. how integrated assessment might be achieved in year 1.
5. Build strategic relationships with the pharmacists & pharmaceutical industry in the region through the stakeholder group, as early as possible.
6. Consider future proofing the programme design, in relation to the expert task force on the expansion of the role of the pharmacist and the recommendations in relation to pharmacist prescribing starting with common clinical conditions through to full independent prescribing.
7. Make clearer the incorporation of UDL into the programme e.g. consider the accessibility formats of the handbook, which is currently proposed as a hard copy document.
8. Clarify and evidence in the programme document the implementation of the N-TUTORR supported Curriculum Development Framework in the development and design of the programme.
9. Prepare a detailed Assessment Plan for year 1 (including assessment tasks that are not credit bearing) to inform a review of student workload to ensure a manageable workload for students and to assist students in their planning.
10. Ensure the rules and regulations regarding repeat strategies of all assessment components (CA, Final Examinations, Work Placements), in particular restrictions regarding the number of repeats, are clearly articulated in the programme documentation and in the Programme Student Handbook shared with students of the programme.
11. Review reading lists of all modules and update with the latest editions where/if relevant.

Report Approval

This report has been agreed by the review panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

<p>Signed: </p> <p>Name: Ms Aileen Kennedy Validation Panel Chair</p>	<p>Date: 15th November 2024</p>
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